

6207 N 18th Road  
Arlington, VA 22205  
July 6, 2012

Most Reverend Paul S. Loverde  
Archbishop of Arlington  
Chancery  
Arlington, VA 22203

Dear Bishop Loverde:

I am writing to most respectfully ask that you reconsider the directive of May 10, 2012, requiring a Profession of Faith by all those who act as a catechist in the diocese of Arlington's parish religious education programs. I fully support your expressed goals of rediscovering the power and beauty of our Catholic Faith and of communicating that faith in a way that young people may truly be formed as authentic disciples of the Lord Jesus. I understand why you expect those who are teaching young people to be able to assent to the basic doctrines regarding our Lord Jesus Christ and to the importance of the Roman Catholic Church in preserving and passing down the faith.

What is troubling, however, is the new requirement that catechists swear an oath to "accept and hold each and every thing definitively proposed by the Church regarding teaching on faith and morals" and that they "adhere with "religious submission of will and intellect to the teaching which either the Roman Pontiff or the College of Bishops enunciate when they exercise their authentic Magisterium, even if they do not intend to proclaim these teachings by a definitive act."

I respectfully ask you to reconsider the requirement that catechists take this oath as a condition of their being allowed to teach religious education classes in the diocese of Arlington. In your letter, you state that part of your commitment in this Year of Faith is to "new efforts of evangelization, aimed at a reinvigorated communication of the Faith, especially to those who have drifted away from the Church." How, I wonder, does a Profession of Faith by those who are already giving substantially of their time and talent to the Church contribute to achieving that goal? Why, I wonder, is my bishop expressing mistrust in either my sincerity in transmitting the faith or in my capacity to convey the tenets of our faith authentically? Further, I wonder why, if there is concern about the authentic transmission of the faith, are catechists being required to swear an oath of fealty rather than being educated in the teachings of the Church?

For a Catholic who takes the Profession seriously, who wishes to understand it fully, and who wishes to be true to her conscience, it is impossible to take such an oath. You do not specify, nor, as I understand it, it is not even possible to specify ALL the teachings proposed definitively by the Church or proclaimed by the Magisterium "even if they do not intend to proclaim these teachings by a definitive act." Thus it is impossible to know exactly what a person is assenting to by taking this oath. Moreover, although the fundamental truths of the Church's

teachings may have been consistent over time, their expression may not have reached their fullest expression in the present. These imperfections may lead a conscientious Catholic to have certain private reservations about certain teachings. Although I fully understand the authoritative role of the Catholic hierarchy in defining the teachings of the faith, in my view only a person who is willing to abandon her own reason and judgment, or who is willing to go against the dictates of her own conscience, can agree to sign such a document. By forcing this issue, you are depriving students who enroll in parish religious education classes throughout the diocese of teachers who, though they may have private reservations on particular issues, are otherwise engaged Catholics who are committed to transmitting the faith in an authentic fashion.

In this 50th anniversary year of Vatican II, I hope and pray that you as well as the other officials of the Catholic Church in the United States will work with the laity to promote a sense of loving kindness and compassion that reaffirms our larger Catholic beliefs and values.

Yours truly,

Dr. Rosemarie Zagarrì  
Professor of History  
George Mason University  
5th grade catechist, St. Ann's Parish

cc:

Rev. Paul F. deLadurantaye  
Rev. Donald Greenhalgh